Sermon 15: The Deconstruction of Illusion

The Bahiya Sutta & The Cinema of Experience

Based on the *Nibbana Sermons* of Ven. Katukurunde Nanananda, expounded by Bhikkhu Anālayo.

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The Urgent Request of Bahiya of the Bark-Cloth

Bahiya was a seeker who rushed to the Buddha, interrupting his alms round to beg for a teaching. The Buddha's response was immediate and piercing—a teaching delivered in the middle of the street, moments before Bahiya's sudden death by a cow.

This context proves the teaching requires no long incubation; it is a direct strike at the root of existence.

The Instruction: Just the Seen

The Buddha's formula for immediate liberation is a command to stop the mental processing before it congeals into a 'self':

In the seen, there will be just the seen.

In the heard, just the heard.

In the sensed, just the sensed.

In the cognized, just the cognized.

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The Trap of Maññana (Imagining)

The Arhat does not “imagine thereby.” Maññana is the act of driving a “peg” of conceit into the fluid stream of experience. We imagine “I am the seer,” turning a process into an entity.

When we objectify the seen, we create acquisitive tendencies—craving to acquisitive tendencies—craving to possess the view, or fearing to lose it.

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The Grammar of Existence

The concept of ‘I’ (First Person) automatically creates ‘You’ (Second Person) and ‘He/It’ (Third Person). This grammatical structure measures out the world.

The Bahiya instruction dismantles this triad. When you stop imagining:

- You will not be ‘by’ that (Agent)
- You will not be ‘in’ that (Container)
- You are neither here, nor there, nor in between.

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The Cinema of Experience: The Darkness

The world we perceive is like a cinema show. We see the ‘movie’ of life only because of two factors:

1. A narrow beam of light (consciousness).
2. The thick darkness around us (Ignorance/Avijja).

Without the surrounding darkness, the beam would not create a vivid image. We are captivated by the play of shadows.

The Cinema of Experience: The Fade

When the doors open and the sun enters the theater, the movie doesn't disappear, but it fades into ghostliness. The 'lesser light" of the projector is superseded by the "greater light" of the Sun.

Similarly, when the intrinsic luster of Wisdom arises, the sensory world ("the seen") loses its solidity. It becomes translucent—a mere shadow.

The Enigmatic Verse

After Bahiya's death, the Buddha described his state not as a location, but as a condition:

"Where water, earth, fire, and air find no footing,
There the stars do not shine,
The sun spreads not its luster,
The moon does not appear..."

It sounds like a void of darkness, but it is the opposite.

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Not a Place, But a State

The Commentary suggests the verse describes a mysterious dark realm. However, the Sermon interprets this as *Anidassana Vinnana*—Non-manifestative consciousness.

It is the experience of Nibbana here and now. The “world-show” stops not because the world is destroyed, but because the mind no longer projects “self” into it.

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The Hierarchy of Lights

Why do the stars “not shine”? Not because it is dark, but because they are outshone.

The Buddha lists four lusters:

1. Fire (The candle)
2. Moon (The night)
3. Sun (The day)
4. Wisdom (The highest)

Just as the sun makes the stars invisible, Wisdom makes the sun and moon of worldly existence pale into insignificance.

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Dissolving the Fence

We usually build a fence:
"Internal" (Me) vs. "External" (World).

Where there is a fence, there is
"offense" and "defense."

The Bahiya instruction dissolves
this barrier. When there is no "I" inside,
there is no "World" outside.
The mind becomes unpartitioned
and barrier-less.

The Rope of Training

The Triple Training (Morality, Concentration, Wisdom) is often seen as a ladder. But in practice, it is a Three-Strand Rope. You climb all three simultaneously.

The Bahiya instruction contains all three:

- Morality: Restraint (not dwelling on details).
- Concentration: No distraction.
- Wisdom: No ‘I’ imagining.

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Right View: The Angle of the Dewdrop

You can sit facing the sun all day, but you will only see the rainbow in a dewdrop if you have the precise angle of vision.

Effort alone is not enough; you need Right View.

You must adjust your understanding by a fraction of an inch to see the spectrum of the Dhamma. It is not about amassing data, but about aligning the view.

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The Stopping of the Vortex

When you are ‘not by that’ (agent) and ‘not in that’ (container), the vortex of suffering stops.

It is the cessation of the ‘World-Show.” The six sense bases (the ‘deserted village’) no longer drag you into the whirl of becoming. The struggle ends.

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Conclusion

‘This is peaceful, this is excellent.’

The teaching offers the relinquishment of all ‘assets’—not just physical wealth, but the heavy burden of percepts, concepts, and the ‘Self.’

The result is not a blank darkness, but a state of peace that is visible here and now, timeless, and inviting to come and see.